

Agent Orange

My Great-Great-Grandfather was a Battle of Britain pilot, or so my father told me when I explained to him that I wanted to join the Intergalactic Agricultural Research Establishment. "Let's hope that some of his flying skills are still present in your genes!", were my father's only remarks when I was awarded a flying scholarship.

To be one of "The Chosen Few" was rare, very rare according to the statistics – 30,000 applications for 10 places each year. It isn't that the job is well paid either. Most skilled space pilots earn more than the "Flying Farmers" as our nickname goes – but they don't carry the future of the world on their shoulders, do they?

The IARE was founded to fuse the convergent disciplines of Agriculture and Space Travel into a force which would make the colonisation of other planets more practical and simple. If one is being absolutely truthful, it was the discovery of an Astalan alien agricultural station that made the genetic breakthrough possible despite the IARE's claim that their genetic engineering labs were responsible. The capture of an alien seedpod and the genetic analysis which followed allowed us to realise that farming on other planets was not only possible but could actually be productive too.

From this discovery, it was a simple step for the college to set up entrepreneurial types like me as self-employed space farmers who would plant and harvest crops and bring the valuable cargo back to Earth for sale. Only the very best survive this life for long but it's a challenge that I certainly couldn't refuse.

The greatest unsolved problem at the IARE is that of the farmer's traditional enemy – weeds. Yes, weeds do grow on other planets and we have no way of controlling them. The Astalans have a weedkiller, we can read the references to it on their seed storage pods, but we can't synthesise it at all. It is every Flying Farmer's aim to one day capture some "Agent Orange", a name taken from another weedkiller used in a war during the 20th Century, but it is so far away from the Earth that no one has yet managed to find any.

Well I have to go now, my first mother-ship is ready and I have been assigned my acreage, actually 8 planets, so time to blast off and get planting!

GAMEPLAY

Extracts from the Galactic Farmer Manual published by the IARE

Aim:

To get to the eighth planet of your acreage and fill your ship with the alien weedkiller, codename Agent Orange – only with this can the other worlds be freed from weeds.

When you start you have one mothership with eight daughter vessels but if you are a successful farmer you can sell your crops and use the money to buy better armed, faster and bigger ships. Each time you return to the mother planet you should consult the ship trading prices and consider the purchase of a new vessel.

Ship specifications:

Each daughter vessel contains your seed pod store and unlimited fire power, your shields are, however, very delicate and will only defend you from a few hits.

Your screen display shows the weight of crops collected, the number of seed pods left, your financial position, your score and the number of daughter ships remaining.

Beware of overloading your ships. Daughter ships crash if overloaded, whilst mother ships jettison cargo on take-off if overloaded.

Planet planting:

The most modern techniques of space planting are used by your ships and this makes your task

simple.

To plant a planet simply fly over the virgin soil with your fire button depressed and the pods will be fired into the soil and start to grow.

Any pods fired onto weed infested land, ie land planted by aliens or land already covered by indigenous vegetation, will be wasted.

Ship defence:

You can shoot and destroy the aliens who are trying to seed the planet and if you destroy an alien vessel it jettisons its seed supply which you can collect for extra points.

Whilst planting your crop you may find it easier to avoid the aliens rather than destroy them.

Inter-Planetary Agriculture:

Once your crop is planted it will grow according to its genetic inheritance. This means it follows the growth colour pattern of:

	Spectrum	Amstrad	Commodore
Infant	Blue	Black & White	Green
Ripe	Green	Red & Blue	Red

Only ripe plants can be harvested. Your harvesting is automatic as the daughter ship flies over the ripe green plants.

The special self-seeding cultures developed from the alien genetic stock will grow further crops as time goes on, so keep watching your planted acreage for green plants. It appears that these alien cultures follow the same rules as those developed by John Conway in his 20th Century computer game "Life".

It has proved impossible to harvest the alien crops, which follow the same growth colour patterns but research on this matter is still in progress. It is possible to burn these crops by firing at a very low elevation – you can change this by pressing fire with the daughter ship stationary. Keep the fire button depressed until you see the shots only travelling a very short distance. To revert to normal fire, stop the ship and hold the fire key down until the shots start travelling a long distance again. It is impossible to burn the indigenous vegetation.

Flight patterns:

Your ship is controlled from the keyboard or from a joystick.

Keyboard control patterns are:

	Spectrum	Amstrad	Commodore
Up	O	O	Run/Stop
Down	A	A	Commodore Key
Left	O	O	Cursor up/down
Fire	Space	M	Shift

The onboard computer system will give you the following options whenever you enter the mothership:

Launch, Home Planet, Next Planet, Save Game, Load Game and Quit.

Cargo transfer is effected automatically when you fly your daughter ship into the mother vessel via the landing strip on the left side of the mother vessel.

Home Planet:

When you return to the home planet, the computer will display a slightly different set of options: Trade Ships, Last Planet, Next Planet, Save Game, Load Game, Quit Game.

The cost of new ships is displayed on your screen if you select the first option. You can choose the next type that you can afford and then continue the game.

Whilst on the Home Planet it is good practice to save the current game for re-loading later.